

This year our theme throughout Lent is, “*The Lenten Walk.*” Throughout our mid-week services we will talk about and consider the idea of what walking with Jesus through Lent means for each of us. We will use the Emmaus story as our foundation and we will consider how Jesus meeting us in the midst of our journeys changes, transforms us, and feeds us.

This Lenten devotional is truly a wonderful witness to the faith of a community that has been called, strengthened and fed by a God who never leaves us alone. It is full of the love of God and the presence of the Holy Spirit. I pray it will be a map for you throughout these forty days. I pray it will fill your empty places and make you full with the love of Christ.

To all the members and friends of LCR who took the time to write their reflections on each reading thank you. By allowing the Holy Spirit to work through you we have all been given a wonderful gift.

I invite you to set aside time everyday to read through the Scripture suggested for the day, read through your fellow sister or brother’s reflection on each reading, and then take a few moments to breathe deeply for you are truly in the presence of the Holy.

I pray this devotional serves as a companion for you on your Lenten journey. May it bring you strength, hope, comfort, and the reminder that we join together as one community... on one journey... praying and reflecting on God’s Word.

Peace,
Pastor Colleen



February 25 – Ash Wednesday – 2 Corinthians 5:20b-6:10

Good-bye Epiphany. So long Transfiguration Sunday. Hello Lent. As we transition into our Lenten journey, let us use this time to transform our relationship with God through Jesus. This is the message that Paul proclaims here. But it is more than just an inward transformation that he details. It involves how our relationship with this incredible loving God is reflected to the world as we represent our Lord as ambassadors of God’s grace... as we spread the word of reconciliation to the world through being God’s hands and feet. The world is watching. How will you ‘be the change’?

Kensington Cares

Church Council: elected, administrative,

Church business: reports, deliberative,

A small group ministry sought

Team building exercise wrought

Bonding experience, anticipate.
Pound some nails, fabricate.
Check that off my list.
What? Not something anonymous?

Ugh... face-to-face with people in need
Not just an impersonal soup-line feed
People and families that live on the street
These aren't humans that I usually meet.

Prep at Washington Crossing UMC
My strength in organization - wasted
Okay, okay - a worker I will be.
(Hope there's not a lesson in this for me...)

Engineering efficiency sacrificed
For fellowship with each roll sliced
Meatball sandwich assembly-line
Homemade soup for them to dine.

Icy cold and windy shear
Homeless street-worn come near
Easier to serve (do) than listen (be)
(age-old Martha/Mary dilemma)

Smiles thaw hearts while Paul's hands
freeze
At hot beverage-making ease
Easier to serve and table's wait
Than listening to a person's fate

There's Becky sitting down with Brian
Hard times – Heroin addict
No judging, she listens.
He is thrilled that someone cares.

Marie sits down with Bill
Robbed, beaten, broken, addict
Can we see Christ in this human being?
Can Brian and Bill see Him in us?

Kara oversees donations of new gloves
This is reaching out with love
More than coffee – more than service
Slow down, don't be nervous.

See and hear He's speaking to me
Bill's broken heart, Brian's laughter
In Christ relationship's rescued
Who's ministering to whom?

Frank Ehrenfeld III

February 26 – Daniel 9:1-14

Daniel has been in captivity for sixty-nine years. God had promised seventy years of captivity. In recognizing whom God was, Daniel wanted to make himself available to help in the promised restoration. He chose to seek an answer by prayer and supplication with fasting and sackcloth and ashes.

Before even asking what he could do, he acknowledged that God was great and awesome and that God kept the promised covenant of steadfast love with those who obeyed God. Daniel confessed the sinfulness that had gotten them to this punishment of captivity. He stated that God was righteous and that they need to be ashamed for their behavior.

I cannot help but think of our country's present state. There are so many voices of criticism toward others. One politician was interviewed on a morning show not long ago. He squirmed in his seat and blamed someone else when asked some hard questions. Where is the accountability? No, it is not one person's fault as it has taken us years to get here.

Daniel put it out there that they had disobeyed God and the shame was on them. He was putting himself before God as a willing servant. Daniel was asking what his responsibility would be in the restoration. He was looking to God for guidance.

Whom are we putting our trust in today? After sixty-nine years of captivity, Daniel still had hope in God. I am not sure most of us can begin to fathom what their captivity was like and I don't believe many of us have experienced anything like it.

Obedience is seeking God for guidance and direction. It is not obedient to put all of our hope in a human being. What responsibility do we take for our country's state of affairs? Have we asked God what our responsibility is in its recovery? Daniel gave us a model how to seek God.

*Awesome and merciful God, it seems your people, us, continue to be disobedient. We seek you today humbly acknowledging our sinfulness. Show us our sinfulness. Lord, we desire to be obedient. Please show us what our responsibility is in our country's recovery.
In Jesus' name, Amen*

Rev. Bruce J. Thorsen

February 27 – Daniel 9:15-25a

As I read and reread my chosen passage hoping for inspiration, and the deadline drew near, and "reminder" emails began appearing, one sentence from verse 18 kept popping out at me. Daniel was pleading to God: "We do not make requests of you because we are righteous, but because of your great mercy." Wow, isn't that a statement that hits the nail on the head. If we could only pray if we were righteous, boy would we be in a heap of trouble. Verse 15 states: "...we have sinned, we have done wrong." Gee, people haven't changed much over the years, have we? So thank goodness for God's mercy.

But, there's more to it, a bigger picture, than just that fact that we should be grateful for God's mercy. This statement was true a long long long time ago – and it's still true today. In this age of fast and furious technological advances such that the computer you bought today will be outdated by next month (or sooner), there is that one rock, that constant, in God. And not only is God a constant in our lives, but has been in the lives of many people, through many rewarding and difficult times, through thousands of years. That is pretty amazing.

And so we continue to pray, we continue to ask, not because we deserve it, but because of God's great mercy.

Christie Paton

February 28 - Psalm 32

Psalm 32, written by David after his affair with Bathsheba, gives us instructions on how to leave the darkness of sin, and through repentance, comes into the light of a joyful reunion with the Lord. The psalmist begins by explaining how evils are to be dealt with during our justification with God. Our transgressions are forgiven through the Christ and therefore God does not impute or track our sins. We are given a "clean slate" through Christ's sacrifice that covers our sins. Yet we are reminded that we are to approach God humbly and honestly in our repentance. We must not be deceitful and abuse the precious gift of "free grace" by holding back on turning from our sinful ways.

The psalmist reflects on the period without repentance and God's grace. Our spirit "wastes away" as our conscience relentlessly saps our strength both day and night. This is arid isolated desert of the mind torments of our soul. Yet God does not want us in this tormented state, especially to wither and die. He admonishes us not to let our anger or pride stand in the way ("like an unbridled mule or horse"), in seeking forgiveness... Yet His mercy is freely given to all who seek mercy from the Lord. Only when we lay our sins and guilt upon Christ will we receive peace.

God heals the troubled mind through his Holy Spirit. He calls us to be faithful and pray so that we will not be overwhelmed by the troubled waters which flood into all lives. David's words on repentance resonate with promise and love. "Though the proud and impenitent will be tormented, those that repent and trust in the Lord will be surrounded by His Love." So let us shout for joy this message of Love and forgiveness. Christ has suffered and died so that we might rise and live! Alleluia! Alleluia!

Gabe Patay

March 1, First Sunday in Lent – Mark 1: 9-15



In any Bible study of Mark I usually comment, "If Mark were alive today, he would probably work for a newspaper." Not only does he embody the Joe Friday "Just the facts Ma'am" approach to the Gospel stories; but also condensing the story. Just the facts: this passage, appearing in chapter 1, does not appear until the end of chapter 3 in both Matthew and Luke. Further what Mark tells in one or two verses takes usually two to four times as much print in the other Gospels. It is clear he was not getting paid by the word.

What I want to do in this meditation is bracket three separate stories with two quotes that speak to me of the mystery and ministry of Jesus and his earthly mission. The quotes are from verse 11, "You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased." And from verse 15, "The time has come" he said. "The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news."

The first quote establishes who Jesus is. I cannot imagine what it must have been like to have Jesus walk out of the Jordan after his baptism and hearing this disembodied voice declaring that this is my Son. Since John was something of a local attraction there had to be other people present, I wonder what was going through their minds. And then later, when Jesus declares, "The kingdom of God is near." People must have been beside themselves with excitement.

And what better ideas to entertain for the season of Lent: the Son of God is here among us and the Kingdom of God is near. Imagine what our lives and the world would be like if we would begin each day with these two thoughts in our mind. How would your life be different if you truly believed, "The Kingdom of God is near?" Pray on this and know that something wonderful is about to happen.

Clyde Beury

March 2 – Psalm 143

*Hear my prayer; O LORD; give ear to my supplications in your faithfulness;
answer me in your righteousness...*

This passage reminds me that God is faithful regardless of the good and bad times in life. Simply because we may be experiencing trying times, times that are lonely, time when life is difficult does not mean God is not near. God is always near and God is always faithful.

God of faithfulness – draw near to me...in joy, in pain, in frustration, in fear, in sadness, and in all times of life – you are faithful. Help me to remember that you are there – that you do not hide your face from me and that you will lead me all that days of my life. Be with me this day and always. Amen.

Pastor Jenn Casey

March 3 – Job 5: 8-27

A few weeks ago I was listening to a group from the early 1970's, Seatrain and a particular track on their first album The Story of Job. The book of Job is not short, so with the obligatory drum solo, the song runs for about 15 minutes. And it is a faithful retelling of the trials and travails of 'Job, a righteous man.' In chapter 4 we meet Job's friend Eliphaz the Temanite, one of a triad of friends come to console Job in his grief at the deaths of his children and loss of wealth.

If ever it could be said, "With friends like these, who needs enemies?" all three of Job's friends made the same mistake of assuming that Job had committed some great sin and caused his own suffering. Neither they nor Job knew about Satan's conversation with God. It is a sad fact of human nature that we want to blame people for their own troubles, or find someone else to blame. Rabbi Kushner addressed this problem in his best selling book, When Bad Things Happen to Good People.

Eliphaz correctly says to Job, "Blessed is the man whom God corrects" and then he continues from verses 17 to the end of the chapter to talk about the benefits of accepting God's correction. But who among us wants to hear this when we are in pain. This is the power of women that they will sit with someone in pain and just let them get it out of their system; men all too often want to first explain how the person got into their predicament then to fix the problem. While some problems need to be fixed and can be fixed; some problems that are beyond our ability to fix just need a sympathetic ear.

I remember a professor in a counseling course saying that the first and most important thing that we can do to promote healing is simply give the person permission to speak and not say

anything. It is often in our silence during someone's pain that we most loudly proclaim the good news of Christ's love for his Father's creation.

Clyde Beury

March 4 – Matthew 4: 1-11

In this reading Jesus was led into the desert for forty days and forty nights to be tempted by the devil. The devil tries everything he can to get Jesus to worship him. No matter what the devil offers Jesus, he refuses. It is only after Jesus says, “Away with you Satan! For it is written ‘Worship the Lord your God, and serve only him,’” that Satan left and the angels came to minister to him.

I must have read this a hundred times and the part that I don’t understand is why Jesus needed to be tempted in the first place? He already knows good from evil and right from wrong, so why tempt him?

I think it was for all of us, that Jesus had to pass this test. Maybe it was to show us how to make better choices. Sometimes I feel like I’m being tested by God and I don’t think that I always make the decisions that God would want me to make. I’m praying that during this Lenten season, when faced with a tough choice, I can turn away from the devil and walk towards God. Every choice that we make with a pure heart brings us one step closer to God. Maybe then, I can make it through the hard times with renewed faith, just like Jesus.

Amen

Woody Woodward

March 5 – Proverbs 30: 1-9

*I am the most ignorant of men; I do not have a man’s understanding.
I have not learned wisdom, nor have I knowledge of the Holy One.*

*Who has gone up to heaven and come down?
Who has gathered up the wind in the hollow of his hands?
Who has wrapped up the waters in his cloak?
Who has established all the ends of the earth?
What is his name, and the name of his son?
Tell me if you know!*

*Every word of God is flawless; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.
Do not add to his words, or he will rebuke you and prove you a liar.*

*Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die:
Keep falsehood and lies from me;
Give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.*

*Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say:
Who is the Lord?
Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of God.*

Benjamin Franklin once said: “We are all born ignorant, but one must work really hard to remain stupid!”

The oracle, Agur begins his discourse by admitting his ignorance of his knowledge of the Holy One. The stupidity of people continues this ignorance when they decide to independently “know” God by their own efforts, by their own wisdom. All such attempts are as much folly as trying to gather wind in one’s hand or to wrap water in one’s cloak.

It is only when we ask for the ‘daily bread’ of the wisdom that comes with total dependency on the Holy Spirit that we will have any chance of really knowing God.

To know God one must have a complete loving relationship with him. To know God is to live with Jesus and his supreme sacrifice on the cross as the center of our heart. To know God is to live with Jesus as the Light that will guide us through this life and the Light that can shine forth also to others. John 8.12

Michael Reynolds

March 6 – 1 Peter 3: 8-18a

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble.”

It is interesting how things just “happen”, the coincidences or God-incidences. I randomly picked this verse for the Lenten Readings and I am about half way through reading The Shack by William P. Young. There are several underlying themes apparent in both, one being the ability to submit to God and to one another.

In the book The Shack, humans have really messed things up in their relations with God and with one another, mostly because we all want to be in charge. It is almost not “humanly” for people to submit to one another. Yet most of the problems in this world come from everyone wanting their way. We say we are open minded and listen to the opinions of others, but do we really? Isn’t it so easy to talk with people who agree with you, and so difficult to listen to those who don’t share our thoughts. The above verse from Peter states that we should live in harmony and love one another. Not just the people that agree with us. This is the most difficult thing to do.

Thankfully, God is patient with us. Peter started out as the blustery, loudmouth apostle who sliced off an ear of a guard in Jesus’ defense and changed into a humble and obedient servant who advocated submission, consideration and respect for one another. In my study Bible, Peter is considered the apostle of hope. I hope this Lent, I will make some necessary changes in my thinking so that I can become more sympathetic and compassionate to the people I don’t agree with and learn to live harmoniously with all of God’s children.

Berni Beury

March 7 – Psalm 77

For me, the 77th Psalm really captures much of our life as people of God. We cry out for God to hear us and help us. We recognize that we need God's support. We know that we are a broken people and we are in distress.

We doubt, we question, we despair and we wonder – has God forgotten us? Sometimes it may seem that way.

However, then, just when we need it most, we remember. We remember that God is great and holy. We remember that God performs miracles and takes care of us. We realize that God is active and present in our lives just as he was in the lives of Moses and Aaron and all who came before us.

As we live on this side of the cross, we have the benefit of certain knowledge of all that God has done in the past and we know that God will lead us forth just as God has always done. This provides me with an assurance that I must trust and believe – God will be with me always.

Dear God,

Help me to trust and remember that I am a child of God. You do not forget your children and you have promised to walk with me always. You are a strong and powerful God who is great and holy. Help me to remember this every day – especially when I am weak and filled doubt. Amen

Diane Casey

March 8 – Second Sunday in Lent – Mark 8: 31-38

Talk about being guided by the Holy Spirit! I randomly chose 2 passages to reflect upon this year. This one and John 12:20-33. Wasn't I surprised to find that they talk about the same event – Jesus Predicts His Death. While both gospel writers have different takes on the story, the message comes across the same: Having it all in this life does not guarantee a place in eternity. Jesus' message to his apostles are that he must suffer and die, it is his destiny. There is no use fretting about it or getting all worked up. It will happen because it is in God's plan.

How often do we get caught up in our own plans? How often do we pray to God for things we think we need or want? Do we stop to consider God's plan for us? Do we have the faith to believe that he has a purpose for our lives? Jesus tells Peter, "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." Let us remember to pray that God's will be done and have the faith to know he will carry us through no matter what!

Marie Speers

March 9 – Genesis 21: 1-7

“and the Lord did for Sarah what he had promised. Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him.”

God's promises are not to be taken lightly because God's promises come with the guarantee of God's love and grace. The author Frederick Buechner, in his book *Wishful Thinking*, puts it this

way: "The grace of God means something like: Here is your life. You might never have been, but you are because the party wouldn't have been complete without you. Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid. I am with you. Nothing can ever separate us. It's for you I created the universe. I love you."

That is the promise of God. That we have been thought of from the very beginning and that we are all an intricate part of the world. God promises to be with us in this world. God promises to love us unconditionally. Despite our pain, our grief, and our sorrow. Despite the ways in which we disappoint and neglect our relationships with one another and with God. Despite all of the ways in which we fail God and one another God promises to carry through on God's promise to take care of us, provide for us, and be with us. Sarah and Abraham had given up on the idea of ever having their own child. Then God intervened and made them a promise. What they thought was impossible became possible through God.

Later in this passage Sarah says, "*God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me.*" God makes promises to us every day. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, God has made the greatest promise of all. That nothing, not even death, will come between us and our relationship with God. That is pure joy... and everyone who hears about this will, as Sarah has said, laugh with us. That is the promise of God. And the people say, Amen!

Pastor Colleen

March 10 – Psalm 19: 1-9



This psalm declares that the natural, physical world witnesses to the power and wonder of God. The heavens declare the glory of God. The skies proclaim the work of God's hands. Nature itself never ceases to praise and worship God.

During this, "in between," time of year where it is both winter and spring I find myself noticing all the signs of nature around me. The daffodils beginning to poke their heads out of the cold, frozen earth, the birds singing in the sunrise, and at night the glory of the heavens singing God's love back to me. The witness of God's great creation brings me close to God.

Dear God, thank you for the witness of your creation. Amen

Pastor Colleen

March 11 – Mark 10: 32-34

Selfless. What better word to describe Jesus? When I read these few verses that is what comes to mind. Jesus understood everything that was going to happen to him during his life. He knew that he was going to be mocked, spit upon, flogged, and killed. With all of that in mind, he lived to serve all of us, all before us, and all that will come after us.

During this Lenten season, I am reminded of my selfishness. I know that if someone gave me the opportunity to save the world, and have my name be praised forever, but in order to get that chance, to give my life, I would turn away. I am not that selfless. I would ask myself too many questions. What about my husband, my kids, my family and friends? Could I stand not being able to hold them again? To talk to them?

I am going to use this time to pray about my selfishness. To ask God to make me more like Jesus, and put the needs of others in front of my own. Every day during Lent, I am going to challenge myself to do one generous act a day. I hope that the whole congregation would do the same. Could you imagine what the world would be like if we all lived like Jesus and served other people's needs instead of our own?

Heavenly Father,

Thank you for sending Jesus to save me. During the Lenten season, please help me to be more selfless and generous. In Jesus name I pray. Amen

Audrey Woodward

March 12 – Jeremiah 30: 12-22

This passage begins very dismally written during the Babylonian captivity. “For thus says the Lord: Your hurt is incurable, your wound is grievous.” To hear this when you are in captivity could dash ones hope of ever returning to their land. Seventy years is a long time and many probably did not ever believe they would return.

Thankfully, we see further in the passage “For I will restore your health to you, and your wound I will heal”. The Lord allowed them to be led into captivity, but never left them alone. Those who chose to trust in the Lord during this time received hope. This time was for learning once again to depend on the Lord.

We have all experienced times in the valley. What have we learned? One thing I have learned is to keep going forward, learning from the past, but not dwelling there. While in the valley we can begin to examine what we have control over and what we don't. Those things that we do not we can give over to the Lord.

Restoration for those in captivity did not begin at the end of the seventy years, but during the seventy years. The restoration I am speaking of is not the return to their land, but to God. This happens as we learn to take one day at a time. I don't believe we can in a healthy way jump out of a valley, but to reach out and up to God in Jesus Christ and gifts or people that he puts in our paths.

Hope comes from believing that there is something better ahead. As Christians, we know the ultimate is heaven. During this Lenten season we are challenged to examine where we are, learn what we can and then look forward.

We hear about their prince coming, someone who will lead them home. They never met the ultimate prince, Jesus Christ, but they looked forward to his coming. This is something that gave them hope. Can it give us hope too?

The passage ends with God claiming them as his. Hopelessness is about feeling all alone. God says to God's people in Jeremiah's time and to us, "And you shall be my people, and I will be your God". Hopefulness is believing we are not alone in our journey, that you are always there.

God of hopefulness, we experience valleys in our life. As we have seen your people throughout history learning to trust in you during their valleys, help us walk with you daily. May your Holy Spirit nudge us when we feel alone and hopeless, reminding us if we reach out, you are there. You have promised us that when we turn to you, you are always there. We claim this and thank you for it. In Jesus, name. Amen

Rev. Bruce J. Thorsen

March 13 – Hebrews 11: 1-3, 8-19

FAITH – my favorite five letter F word. Not everyone likes F words but this is one that I like, I even have to remind my friends to have it. The word kind of hit me. This is the one word that I noticed and sort of bolded itself to me as I read these verses. Throughout the entire passage Faith is used in the statement: "It is faith..." Faith is even the header for the entire passage in my Bible. The passage keeps stating that we need to have faith as Abraham had. All the faith that Abraham had in God gave him a son with his wife who was beyond child bearing age, allowed him to offer his son as a sacrifice and have as many descendants as there are stars in the sky. Abraham's faith gave him so many gifts, more than I think Abraham ever expected. Imagine yourself as Abraham, do you have that much faith to be able to sacrifice your first child or to wander the Earth until you come to land where God wants you to be? Is your faith that strong in the Lord God? Do you have enough faith to give back to God what is so precious to you?

Personally, I have to say for the past year, some of my faith has taken some hits. I was not sure what I was going to do when I decided to leave my husband and take my daughter to a new area of Levittown. I picked Kelly up and moved out because we had just lost the house, put her in a new school and even take on a new adventure of my own by going back to school to become a teacher. It seemed that every time I had found a place in a job, the company shut the office down. I had to keep reminding myself that my faith in the Lord was going to get me through this. I don't know if I have done all that I can, but I feel that I have come to a place where I should be. I wandered my part of the Earth to find my way. Maybe this is where God believes I should be. I found my faith again, and I hope that I never come to the point when I think that I have lost it.

Gracious God,

Please give all of us the faith to follow you and do as you want us. Times today may be hard but with all your love and caring, you will show us where we need to wander and give us the

*strength to be able to handle what is presented to us. Give us the faith to be able to give back to you what is so precious to us.
Thank you Lord, Amen.*

Jenn Vajda

March 14 – Psalm 105: 1-11, 37-45



Psalm 105 is a psalm of thanksgiving towards God. In the first four verses, it says that we should shout, sing, and speak of all the great things that he has done for us, and that we should always continue to look for him. Psalm 105 uses the story of Abraham to show how wonderful God is and how he always fulfills his promises.

Let us pray,

Dear God, thank you for all that you have done for us, and all that you continue to do. We are so grateful and continue to look for all the things that you are constantly doing for us, big and small. Please fill our hearts with your loving grace, in Christ's name we pray. Amen

Kara Mullican

March 15 – Third Sunday in Lent – John 2: 13-22

John's Gospel declares over and over again that Jesus is the Word made flesh. We too bear witness to that truth in our prayer life, in our daily lives, and in our lives as members of a faith community.

Gracious God, you have shown us the power, your authority, and your love. Help us to live today as witnesses to you. Amen

Pastor Colleen

March 16 – 1 Kings 6: 1-14, 21-22

1 Corinthians tells us we *are* the temple. *"You are a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God...Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple..."* (1 Corinthians 6:19, 3:16)

This reading is so interesting to me – the building of the temple by Solomon was so deliberate and exacting, made according to the word of the Lord as the Lord came to Solomon. Solomon built this temple for the Lord and not for himself. He listened to the Lord and did as he was told. In reading the exacting measurements, the method of building, the design, the décor – I find myself trying to understand what it is that God is telling me to do with another temple –me! Do I take the time to listen for directions? Do I ask God for help with the blue prints of my life? Am I building my temple according to God's directions? Solomon demonstrates commitment,

timing, methods, care, love. He built the temple for God. I am doing the same thing with the temple I've been given? Are these not also building specifications for our lives?

Sandy Mullican

March 17 – 2 Chronicles 29: 1-11, 16-19

“They abandoned the Lord and his Temple; they turned their backs on him. They also shut the doors to the Temple’s foyer, and they snuffed out the lamps.”

The book of Chronicles highlights the leadership of Judah’s kings. All through the book of Chronicles the leaders were described as either doing what was pleasing in God’s sight or doing what was evil. The writer of this book recorded their achievements and failures, noting how each king measured up to God’s standard of success. In God’s sight, the government and their devotion to God were meant to be a package deal. No separation of church and state here. The health of the nation was dependent on their devotion to God. The new King, Hezekiah, was described as doing what was pleasing in the Lord’s sight, just as his ancestor David had done. The first order of business for Hezekiah was to reopen the Temple that had been closed shut by the previous king.

This was the temple that was the symbol of God’s presence and the place set aside for worship and prayer. The temple was the spiritual center of the nation. The king before Hezekiah, King Ahaz, was so unfaithful to God that he eventually shut the doors to the Lord’s temple so that no one could worship there and then set up altars to pagan gods in every corner of Jerusalem. Note, they did not abandon worship, they just chose to worship other gods elsewhere. King Hezekiah described them this way. “Our ancestors were unfaithful and did what was evil in the sight of the Lord our God.” They abandoned the Lord and his Temple; they turned their backs on him. They also shut the doors to the Temple’s foyer, and they snuffed out the lamps.

When I read this my first thought was of great sadness if our church shut it’s doors and snuffed out our lamps. I paused a moment to thank God that our ancestors were faithful and all throughout our nation and its communities we still have many places to freely worship Christ. May we remain strong and faithful and be guided by the Holy Spirit to grow and abound in faith and in numbers throughout all churches.

Marian Robey

March 18 – Mark 11: 15-19

Have you ever been so mad that you have thrown a major fit; where everything was in your way and you threw it across the room? Well this is what happened when Jesus came to Jerusalem and went into the temple and basically found street vendors selling things in the place of prayer and worship – the temple. His anger is so much that he overturns all the tables of those who are selling birds and other trinkets, stating that this is not what is supposed to be done in a temple. Once he had their attention he then teaches them that a temple is the place for prayer and worship.

This is so true in a church or temple today. It is not a place to sell, it is a place to worship and pray. I have always considered our church as peaceful and a place for calm reflection. Let us all remember that.

Dear Lord,

Help us all to remember that a church is where we can go to worship you and pray. Thank you for teaching us the true meaning of a church and what it stands for. Give us the chance to show you that we do not fear you but do love you.

Amen

Jenn Vajda

March 19 – John 1:1-9

...there was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the life, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world...

When we look around, it can be easy to feel as though we are in darkness. Not only are the days short and cold with the winter chill, we look around and see the economic crisis, the unemployment numbers rising, wars across the world and violence across the street. Things can appear rather dark in the world around us. However as people of God, children of the Creator – we know that there is light in the midst of our darkness. We know there is light coming to save us from all darkness. We know of the future to come when the darkness will vanish and the true light will beam forever.

Let us be like John, witnessing to our families, friends, and the entire world around us so that all might know the light that is both present and yet to come.

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make us instruments of your peace. Where there is hatred, let us sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is discord, union; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy. Grant that we may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life.

Amen.

Pastor Jenn Casey

March 20 – 1 Corinthians 3: 10-23

Somehow I'm always drawn to Paul's Letters to the Corinthians because so much of his writings relates so well to our congregational lives today. He wrote to the Corinthians to identify the problems in their church, to offer solutions and to teach these new believers how to live for Christ in the corrupt society that was all around them. Isn't that also what we face today as true believers? It seems human nature never changes. Our faith is constantly being tried by the worldly standards that surround us.

In this particular passage, Paul reminds us that the foundation of the church and its believers is Jesus Christ. A building is only as solid as its foundation. Jesus Christ is our base and we must always guard against the pressure from outside forces that tempt us to build our lives, instead, on a faulty foundation such as wealth, security, success or fame. Even within the church we must be alert to being distracted by divisions and controversy over worldly things that arise between our fellow members and even our leaders. Although we should not neglect our pursuit of knowledge,

Paul warns us that if it holds us back from God, it is not wisdom at all. It is better to cling to God's way of thinking even if it might make us look foolish to the world.

Dear Lord, help us to be "fools for Christ." Give us strength to live Christ-centered and loving lives that make a difference so that we do not blend in with the world and accept its values and standards over yours.

Betty Berner

March 21 – Psalm 84

The Seventh day the Lord states is a day to come and rest. Spend time with the Lord and come to understand and get to know me.

"Happy are those who are strong in the Lord and who want above all else to follow your steps. When they walk through the Valley of Weeping it will become a place of springs where pools of blessing and refreshment collect after rains. They will grow constantly in strength and each of them is united to come to my temple or place of worship."

As stated in this scripture a single day spent in your temple is better than a thousand anywhere else. I would rather be a doorman of the temple of my God than live in palaces of wickedness.

God is our light and our protector. He gives us grace and glory. Blessed are those who trust in the Lord.

Ronnie Gropper

March 22- Fourth Sunday in Lent – John 3: 14-21

Great. I thought signing up early for the Lenten Devotional would secure me some pretty easy scripture. Naturally, I quickly wrote my name next to the scripture that contained such a well known verse that even NFL fans would appreciate... do you remember the guy who used to sit near the end zone at each year's Superbowl with the crazy rainbow wig and wave the John 3:16 sign?!

I think about that guy now, not as someone trying to distract the place kicker, but as someone whose evangelical tool was able to communicate Christ to millions of viewers at a shot. Talk about efficient witnessing. Think Moses holding up the snake, think rainbow wig guy holding up his sign, think God holding up his Son on a cross. Though the scale of these actions is obviously skewed, they all point to Christ: to sacrifice, to substitution, and to salvation. I think also of Sophia, the judgment character featured in William P. Young's popular book, *The Shack*. I can't even fathom sacrificing my only son. If forced, what would I choose? In this same way, it's so hard to comprehend a God who loves me so much that his plan – all along, from the beginning – involved such a substitution... for me!

Whether snakes or signs, light is required in order to see all of this 'witnessing'. It is interesting that only two books of the bible start with the same phrase... "In the Beginning". Genesis and John's Gospel offer this truth. That Light as the Son, as the Word, and as THE plan are eternal. Not darkness, but light.

The darkness of Lent doesn't slowly fade as the light of Easter somehow creeps in. Nope. It is instantly removed as THE light of the world is revealed. I've believed in my plan for too long – and it never worked. Believing in his plan often seems risky. But with that instant light, I am exposed, I am acquitted, I am set free, and I am loved.

Frank Ehrenfeld III

March 23 – Exodus 15:22-27

In this scripture, the Israelites have just crossed the Red Sea to escape the Egyptians. God gave Moses the power to part the waters and give them safe passage. They have been traveling through the wilderness for three days without water, and now they can't drink the water because it's bitter. Once again God gives Moses the solution when the people promise to do what is right.

God is always there to watch over and protect us, if we listen to His word. He is waiting to heal us when we are broken and lift us up when we fall. He gives us another chance to get it right each day.

Elaine Zimmerman

March 24 – Matthew 22: 23-33

From the Lutheran Book of Worship, Hymn #179 - At the Name of Jesus:

Vs. 1: At the name of Jesus every knee shall bow, every tongue confess him King of glory now. Tis the Father's pleasure we should call him Lord, who from the beginning was the mighty Word.

Vs.3: Humbled for a season, to receive a name. From the lips of sinners unto whom he came. Faithfully he bore it spotless to the last, brought back victorious when from death he passed.

Pastor Colleen

March 25 – John 8: 12-20

When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life."

The Pharisees challenged him, "Here you are, appearing as your own witness; your testimony is not valid."

Jesus answered, "Even if I testify on my own behalf, my testimony is valid, for I know where I came from and where I am going. You judge by human standards. I stand with the Father who sent me. In your Law it is written that the testimony of two men is valid. I am one who testifies for myself; my other witness is the Father, who sent me."

Then they asked him, "Where is your Father?"

"You do not know me or my Father," Jesus replied. "If you knew me, you would know my Father also."

The Pharisees in this story, with their self-elevated position and their attitude of superiority, felt very justified in judging the ways, the behaviors and in this case the claims of others.

Specifically, these lawyers were contesting the validity of Jesus' testimony to be the light of the world.

But Jesus will not accept this indictment! His relationship is with God the Father. So, using the very logic of the law that the Pharisees embrace, he claims the Father as his witness and thereby validates his testimony.

Yet, the Pharisees still don't get it and won't give up. They demand to see Jesus' witness when they ask him, "Where is your Father?" They don't see his father, so they act as if they don't see Jesus' witness. Obviously, they give no credence to Jesus' divinity, or to his claim to messiahship (reported by St. John in the previous Chapter 7), or most importantly to Jesus' relationship to his heavenly Father (reported in John, Chapter 6).

Jesus exposes the basis of the Pharisees judgment to be 'human standards', and until they both understand and accept the paradigm loving relationship of Jesus and his Father, they will be stuck in their misunderstanding and disbelief.

This new relationship of the human Jesus to his heavenly Father is just as important for us to understand as it was for the Pharisees. This understanding is the basis for our own new relationship with the Father. Jesus became a human, walked this earth and was indeed submissive to all of the evils and problems of the world. He did this for our sakes and as our model. And with his atoning death on the cross, he earned the full forgiveness of our sins -- forgiveness that again restores our relationship to the Father. May the Holy Spirit bless us all this Lent with a new awareness and realization of the God relationship that we can receive through the atoning grace gift of Jesus.

Michael Reynolds

March 26 – Isaiah 60: 15-22

In this chapter of Isaiah there are earlier verses that help sum up the main idea quite well.

"Arise my people and let your light shine for all nations to see. For the glory of the Lord is streaming from you." The scripture states that darkness as black as night shall cover the peoples of the earth, but the glory of the Lord will shine from you.

Though once despised and hated and possibly rejected by all, by the Lord's light shining on you will make you beautiful forever, a joy for all the generations of the world. For the Lord states, *I destroyed you in my anger, I will have mercy on you through my grace. Merchants from many lands will flow to you bringing you wealth so much that it will make your eyes shine and will satisfy your every need.*

You will then know at last and really understand that the Lord is your savior and redeemer. Peace and righteousness shall be your taskmasters. Violence will disappear out of your land. Your walls will be salvation and your gates praise.

No longer will you need the Sun or Moon to give you light for the Lord your God will be your everlasting light and Glory.

Ronnie Gropper

March 27 – Hebrews 3: 1-6

My friends, we are chosen by God to be his people. We need to remember that Jesus is the one that God has sent to us to be our high priest. Jesus was faithful to God just like Moses was faithful to God. Jesus is in charge of us, God's people. So we should be faithful to both Jesus and God. We are to never give up hope and always have the faith that Jesus and God will take care of us. For God is who built this wonderful house we worship in every day – our own home and the wondrous church that we go to each week.

Gracious God and Jesus,

Please give us the chance to be chosen by you to do your word and carry out all that you have commanded. We shall be faithful to you and only you. Let us never give up hope that one day you will come to us again, in heaven and on earth.

Amen

Jenn Vajda

March 28 – Psalm 107: 1-16



⁴ *Some wandered in the desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle.*

When we are depressed, scared, worried or have experienced some loss in our lives, it is easy to give up or give in. We find ourselves turning away from God. We tend to blame him for our pain and ask, how could God let this happen to me? Why me? There is a choice we need to make. Do we want to stay in this place of self pity? To wander in the desert?

⁶ *Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their distress.*

It's difficult to face our troubles, but if we choose to turn to God, seek him, he will lead us to peace.

¹ *Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, his love endures forever.*

Praise him in all you do, in all situations. Without him we will stay and wander in the storm. God is waiting patiently like any loving parent would, waiting for us to cry out to him.

In your son Jesus' name I thank you- my God my rock and my redeemer. Amen

Donna Immordino

March 29 – Fifth Sunday in Lent – John 12: 20-33

Talk about being guided by the Holy Spirit! I randomly chose 2 passages to reflect upon this year. This one and Mark 8:31-38. Wasn't I surprised to find that they talk about the same event – Jesus Predicts His Death. The gospel writer, John, tells the story a bit differently but the message

is the same. Jesus is doing God's will by dying for our sins. He asks his apostles if he should ask God to spare him. He immediately answers his own question saying, "No, it was for this very reason I came to this hour. Father, glorify your name!" Let us always remember that we are God's children. He has a purpose for our lives. He has a plan for each and every one of us. Let us follow Jesus' example and do everything to glorify his name!

Marie Speers

March 30 – Isaiah 43: 8-13

Follow me to the ends of the earth and I will protect you from harm. For if you follow me I will protect and defend you. If you do not know me or cannot see the road ahead why not try a different path away from sinful ways and thoughts. If you turn to the Lord and follow down the path that has been chosen for you, it will lead to a feeling of being constantly protected from everything you do. This will also lead to having everlasting life from harm that God can provide for you.

Think about considering giving up all your old ways of clinging to false prophets and believing that you can control your own life. Will this kind of thinking really get you somewhere by believing in false prophets? These false teachings may even lead to you having feelings of failure and deep depression. If you follow the word of the Lord you will find out that relying on anything other than God can lead to disaster. This may even lead to a possibility of doing harmful things that are not pleasing to God and may be hurtful to yourself or others.

Following the guidance of the Lord with your whole heart will lead you to being forever protected and guided and to knowing and believing that in times of trouble the Lord will never leave you.

Ronnie Gropper

March 31 – Isaiah 44: 1-8

I have called you to be my servants and to witness that there is only one God. Who can calm your fears and tells you do not be afraid. The Lord who made you will help you

If you are one of his chosen servants in Jerusalem or just a servant of Israel it states I will give you abundant water for your thirst and your parched fields. I will also pour out my spirits and blessings on your children.

By the model of how you walk in your faith life, people will see the difference and know that you are not afraid. This is due to hearing and listening to the words and guidance you hear from the Lord. People will walk proudly stating that I am the Lord's child or I am a Jew protected by the Lord.

For it is stated in scripture from this chapter of Isaiah, don't be afraid I have proclaimed from ages past that I would save you. You are my witness and there is no other God. There is no other Rock.

Ronnie Gropper

April 1 – John 12: 34-50

When I first read these verses, I thought, “What have I gotten myself into?!” In these verses, Jesus responds in indirect ways, and like the people who asked the questions, I found myself confused and not at all certain my questions had been answered. So I pondered and I prayed.

Finally, after much reflection, I decided that for me these verses are about uncertainty. We want answers that are clear, unambiguous, and without contradiction. If we can’t know for certain, we stick with the crowd. We are afraid to stand out.

It’s interesting that while we want to be followers of a clear path, we question the credentials of anyone who seeks to lead. As a result, we huddle tightly in suspicion and anxiety.

What’s the answer? Well, Jesus responds, “He who believes in Me, believes not in Me but in Him who sent Me.” In modern idiom maybe that would translate, “It’s not about Me, it’s about the message.” Instead of focusing on our doubts about the messenger, maybe we need to open our hearts to the message.

Many years ago, when I was an intern in psychology, one of my patients was a chronic schizophrenic. Because he was a long term patient, he was usually assigned to interns and as a result he had a long series of previous therapists. This means he was forced to withstand many “break-ups” which are painful for all of us, but can be devastating for anyone in a fragile mental state. I apologized in my first session with him for the fact that I would also only be working with him for one year, and I lamented that he had to go through that painful process yet again. He responded that it wasn’t so bad because he was exposed to many ideas and many people. He said he took what was good from each of them and discarded the bad. I asked him how he knew which was which. He said the good ideas were things that felt right to him; things that he might even have thought of himself, but they seemed acceptable when someone else said them. I suggested to him that it sounded like he knew what was best for him but he needed help expressing it. My purpose became to support him in his efforts to explore his thoughts and emotions and to promote self-acceptance.

That day my patient felt valued and important. He recognized the good in himself that he previously attributed to others. I, in turn, learned more from that exchange with a psychotic man than I ever could in years of book study. I try to recognize the strength and individual light that is carried in each person.

Maybe that’s one of the lessons in these verses. The importance is the message itself. It may not be acclaimed by the populace; the messenger may have clear faults; we may not have all the answers, but we can find the light around us.

Fran Kane

April 2 – Haggai 2: 1-9, 20-23



²³ *God tells his faithful servant Zerubbabel he will make him like his signet ring. He has chosen him.*

This made me wonder, how did he live his life in such a way that pleased God so much? What have we done with what the Lord has given us? How do we take care of his land, his money, his time? Do we fully obey the Lord and carefully follow all his commands?

⁴⁻⁵ *For I am with you declares the Lord Almighty. This is what I covenanted with you when you came out of Egypt. And my spirit remains among you. Do not fear.*

We are led by the spirit of God. Now is the time to get our house in order.

²¹⁻²² *I will shake the heavens and the earth. I will overturn royal thrones and shatter the power of foreign kingdoms.*

He will come again. Are you ready?

Donna Immordino

April 3 – 2 Corinthians 3: 4-11

It's funny how you close your eyes and point to a reading. How it is so appropriate for you at the time. Paul is writing to the Corinthians, and telling them that they are all ministers in the new covenant.

The new covenant of the spirit that is given to us by the power of Jesus. This confidence, this light that is within all of us, the tablets of the spirit, for all to share with each other, to proclaim that we are children of God, with all of our differences, can be of a common element.

Moses' face glowed after he was given the written law on the tablets. This was the glory of God shining through Moses. With the new covenant written on the tablets of our spirit, the glory of Jesus also shines through our faces for all people to see. The spirit within our hearts is what gives us life.

As you go out today, may the light of Jesus, shine through you for all to see.
God's peace,

Cheryl Varga

April 4 – Psalm 119: 9-16

I once read that Psalm 119 is "A love poem to God's Law." In the same explanation of Psalm 119 it says, "God's laws channel God's love into our lives."

God gave us the rules of life. Like a loving parent, he instilled in us the values he wants us to have. Especially now, life is full of uncertain times and pain, but God has given us a dependable handbook for living through all of the uncertainties and pain. God never promised us a life that we could sail through with ease. He never promised that we would not experience pain. I often have to remind myself of that. On so many occasions I have said to myself, "When are things going to get better? I believe in God, I follow the rules, so why do I find myself struggling."

Reading this psalm, reminds me of God's word and his love for me. I pray that he gives me the wisdom to get through any situation that I may face, without turning away from him.

Audrey Woodward

April 5 – Palm Sunday – Mark 11: 1-11



“The disciples left and did what Jesus had told them to do.”

After choosing to write a devotional on the above passage, I went home to read what I had chosen only to find it was the same lesson I had last year. I was going to exchange it but decided to stick with it. You see, in 2008, Nicole May and I had this same reading but located in different passages. What stunned me last year was when I read Nicole's opening sentence. She wrote, “Out of eleven verses, this is the verse that I kept reading over and over again.” Well I didn't write what she did, but I had the exact same thing happen to me last year every time I read those verses too. I couldn't get past this “obedience” thing. Doing exactly what Jesus told them to do.

I was again surprised with this obedience word as a result of a touching conversation with another member after one of the discernment discussions held at the church. She was relating to me about a family member who had felt the Holy Spirit was speaking to her by a bible verse she had read on one of those desk calendars that have a different verse each day. The next morning I remembered I had recently found one of those desk calendar sheets stuck in my bible. When I searched for it to see what the verse was that was written on it I was surprised by what I had written on the back of it. What I wrote was “God will give you a specific set of instructions that will result in victory, if you will obey.”

Rev. Bruce wrote last year that during the Lenten season we are called to examine how obedient we are to God in Jesus Christ. He also said the most common excuse we have for not being obedient is fear. This has certainly been something I struggle with. Yet God tells us he has not given us the spirit of fear, but of power and might.

Help us Lord as we continue to examine our obedience to you, to not only listen to your word, but to hear it and obey it too. Cast out the spirit of fear among us and fill us with your holy spirit. Help us to embrace your purposes for us. In Jesus name. Amen.

Marian Robey

April 6 – Psalm 10

When you walk into a store and you see someone that doesn't look like you your opinion on them changes. If someone looks poor, unhappy, or stressed you feel bad for them. When you see a picture of a criminal on the news you feel anger and disgust. It seems almost impossible to feel the same way for this person on t.v. as the person in the store. Yes, there is that fear factor. They obviously have done something wrong where as the person in the store seems helpless and

harmless. In psalm 10, I thought about how God really wants us to treat everyone the same. Both of these types of people are in need. Incredibly different needs but both helpless in their own way. It's hard to feel the same way but at the same time it should be easy. Either way, criminal or saint, God will help us all. In times of fear for someone, he is there. In times of grief for someone, he is there. This psalm tells us that terror and wickedness occurs just as orphans on the street but God will provide strength and protection for both. A psalm can't get any more reassuring when it ends, "from earth may strike terror no more."

Ashley Mullican

April 7 – Psalm 44

"Why have you hidden your face and forgotten our affliction and oppression? We sink down into the dust; our body cleaves to the ground. Rise up, and help us, and save us, for the sake of your steadfast love."

Over and over when I meet with folks who are suffering this question of, "where is God in the midst of this suffering," almost always comes up. Because when we are suffering we have such a hard time feeling God's presence anywhere in our pain. As a matter of fact, most of us pray for God to take our pain away.

But it is these final two verses of this psalm that can give us a clue about how to get through the pain. Sinking down onto our knees is one of the greatest ways we can turn toward God. What is the line, "I'm never taller than when I'm on my knees?" Sinking down into the dust; our body cleaves to the ground. That is another way of saying, "God I'm done trying to hold up all this suffering on my own. I'm tired. I'm weary. I'm asking you to take over."

For that is what God's steadfast love does. It gets down in the dust with us, wraps itself around us, and helps us to rise... pulls us to our feet so we can stand.

Holy God, hold us gently in your arms. Envelop us in your mercy. Strengthen us with your love. Carry us until we can walk on our own. Amen

Pastor Colleen

April 8 – Psalm 137

There were many days for the people in the Babylonian captivity that brought tears as they remembered what they had. They were tormented by their captors to "sing one of the songs of Zion". It was difficult for them to think about singing the Lord's song in a foreign land.

Do we not have songs that evoke memories that can bring us to tears? Sometimes we can find it difficult to even sing them. It may be a time just to listen and be in the moment, the memory. Listen to the words. Read the words. Allow the song to be a healing instrument.

Music evokes many emotions. At one point in history, it stirred people to a revolution. The tormentors in the captivity were trying to use music as a tool to shame and humble the downtrodden. Music had been very important in worshiping God. Now it was being used against them.

When we feel we cannot sing, it sometimes is because of hopelessness in our lives. It took time for the people crying at the rivers of Babylon to be able to sing again. One of the purposes of the African American Spiritual was to remind people that there was hope in the midst of slavery.

Sometimes it is the music or the text or both that can remind us of the hope that we have in Jesus Christ. As I am reading scripture, if I have heard or sung the text, the melody comes to mind. It is also a good way to memorize scripture. Hymns and spiritual songs are meant to point us to God in Jesus Christ.

In this Holy Week, read the text, allow the music to take you closer to the throne. Listen to the music from the balcony as it has been chosen to highlight the day and the appointed texts. Let music be an expression of your faith.

Merciful God, there are times we want to just cry when we feel hurt and lonely. You have given us the gift of music to soothe and heal, to praise and worship you. As we go through this Holy Week, may your Holy Spirit guide us to use music as a tool to draw closer to you and each other. In Jesus Name, Amen.

Rev. Bruce J. Thorsen

April 9 – Maundy Thursday – John 13: 1-17



Recently, I've had the experience of people offering all kinds of assistance. People have brought me dinners, shaved my head, accompanied me to doctor's appointments, and have been available at a moment's notice when I've been too sick to be alone during my chemotherapy. I've allowed myself to receive these gifts which have been so comforting. The people who have offered to do these things for me have done so with humility, love and even joy. Even so, I was initially a little uncomfortable at needing this kind of assistance. These are intimate acts. We sometimes complicate acts of kindness and love with our own issues of worthiness and need.

When Jesus washes the feet of the disciples there is no hierarchy of power, there is no debt to be repaid, there is just another example of how we are to be in relation to one another in this world. This gift was for all, even the "unclean" one who would soon betray him. The gift of his life was for all. God asks all of us to go out into the world and act as servants, humbly, wherever we see need, knowing that everyone is worthy of God's love.

Rev. Susan Bamburak

April 10 – Good Friday – Psalm 22



Psalm 22 (certain excerpts)

- [1] My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?
- [2] I cry out by day, but you do not answer.
- [7] All who see me mock me; they hurl insults, shaking their heads:
- [8] “He trusts in the lord; let the Lord rescue him.

Matthew 27.38, & Mark 15.35: “Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani”, i.e., “My God, My God, why have you forsaken me?”

If the Passover meal that Jesus had with his disciples began at 6:00PM on Maundy Thursday evening, then Jesus’ anguish in Gethsemane could be timed at about 9:00 PM. From this point to Jesus death the next afternoon would be about 18 hours, 1080 minutes of extreme stress, of extreme agony! And the terrible time on the cross itself: 3 hours, 180 minutes, a human ‘eternity’!

Many of those who have studied Jesus from Gethsemane to the Cross have marveled at the few times that he had anything to say to any of the people around him during those 18 hours. By my count, the four evangelists report Jesus words only 22 times in the 15 hours from Gethsemane to the cross. And during the three hours on the cross, they report 7 responses by Jesus’ including our subject declaration.

Have you ever wondered what was going on in Jesus’ human mind during those awful wrenching hours of his passion? He was silent with his words, but we humans know that he was not silent in his mind! After prayer in the Garden, Jesus became energized and declared: ‘OK, not what I want, but what you want will be OK with me!': Mt. 26.42. But then as the hours slowly slipped by, he began to have human doubts. The four gospel evangelists, report some thoughts that are quite parallel to the lamentations of the writer of Psalm 22. The soldiers and officers of the Sanhedrin arrested Jesus, and beat him. The Priests indicted him. Peter betrayed him, and finally cowardly Pilate judged and sentenced him. Where was his heavenly Father in all this? As the Psalmist said: I cry out but you don’t answer! (you don’t seem to care!)

Then, while hanging on the cross, during those times when his mind could clear a bit and override the extreme pain of his muscle spasms, and the nails in his hands and feet, did he wonder again where his Father was? We know that he did, because both St. Matthew and St. Mark report Jesus’ cry: “Eloi, Eloi!!!”

But it didn’t end here! An injection of love from God himself prompted Jesus our human brother to cry out in his wonderful declaration of faith: “Father, into your hands I commit my spirit” Lk

24.46. Jesus turns over to God 100% of his humanness; he declares himself to be 100% dependant on God. And we can make the same declaration from our heart each time we pray: “Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven !”

Michael Reynolds

April 11- Holy Saturday – Lamentations 3: 1-9, 19-24

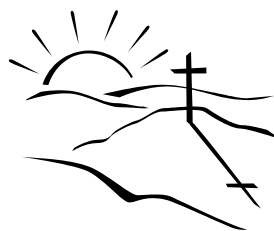
Ah, Lamentations, the book of the Bible that should come with a prescription for Prozac. This mercifully short Old Testament reading is truly Jeremiah’s Dark Night of the Soul. When we move beyond the acrostic poem, which you won’t find unless you read the book in Hebrew, this is the sad song of the destruction of Jerusalem. But, the good news is that even in the midst of his sorrow the Prophet’s hope is strengthened with the assurance that God has been faithful and remains faithful. He sees both God’s judgment and his steadfast love.

At time the passage reminds me of the adolescent lament that they are being punished for too long and unjustly by a cruel parent who does not love them. Their reasoning is that if the parent loved them they would not mete out punishment for not following the rules. But, Israel, like the adolescent must learn that God means what he says and ignoring the direction and loving reproof has consequences.

But, there is good news! The last three verses of this section show the love and mercy which God has for his people, even in their captivity by the Babylonians. Although Israel disregarded the Prophet and the messages he brought from God; Israel must remember that it was Israel that abandoned God, not God who walked away from Israel. So in our confused and troubled lives we must remember that God has not abandoned us- he remains faithful to his creation.

Clyde Beury

April 12- Resurrection of our Lord – Mark 16: 1-8



When is an ending not an end? When a dead man rises from the tomb, and when a Gospel ends in the middle of a sentence. That is how Mark’s gospel ends, practically in the middle of the sentence.

Three grieving women come to the grave to complete the cleaning of the body for its burial; they come to do what you do next when someone has died. At the tomb, they meet a young man in a robe of white who tells them that their friend has risen from the dead and is going ahead of them to Galilee, back where they all came from. And they are terrified and they run off. That’s it.... TA DAH!!! Mark’s gospel is the only one of the Gospels that does not end with comforting stories of the resurrected Jesus’ appearance in the disciples’ midst.

This Gospel has a beginning but what it seems to need is an end. A definite conclusion. A so-what. A where to next.

But maybe that's the whole point. Maybe this story has no end, at least not yet because it is Mark's way of saying: "This story isn't over because now it's your story and mine." This is something like one of those plays where the audience gets to vote on how the play ends after a break in the action. Only in this case, it's the audience that gets to live the end.

The story of Mark's Gospel doesn't have an end because it isn't over. Christ has died, Christ is risen, Christ will come again! A good man was put to death, but the power of God is at work now inviting men and women, children and young people, you and me, into new and transformed lives.

How will we live into our new and transformed lives this Easter? How will the experience of the Risen Christ change how we live?

Mark's story of Jesus has a beginning, but it doesn't have an end. It just keeps going and going, from one life to another, touching and transforming us one by one. The risen Christ was not at the tomb but going ahead of his friends. And that's where we see him today: out ahead of us. Where charity and love prevail over injustice and violence; where compassion and hope replace cynicism and despair; where peace and love take root in lives that are empty and lost; where human beings know joy and justice, dignity and delight: there is the risen Christ, calling to us.

When is an ending not an end? When the end is just the beginning of a story about eternal and abundant life. Amen.

Pastor Colleen